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ABSTRACT

Based on a series of clear lines workshops, this guide about clear language in the workplace was written for people concerned about literacy and clear communication at work. The materials and activities help not only people with reading problems to design documents, memos, letters, and bulletins, but help, also, people who read well. The guide's four main sections deal with the following topics: (1) literacy in Canada and the importance of clear language; (2) the basic principles of clear writing; (3) clear design; and (4) the clear writer goes to work. Each section contains a statement of purpose, a list of subtopics, writing samples before and after clear writing, and a review of the section. The following resources are included: (1) samples of unclear writing; (2) a list of simplified words and phrases; (3) further reading on literacy and clear language; (4) other sources of information on clear language; (5) other clear lines resources; and (6) readability estimates of sample documents. Five references are included. (NLA)

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Clear Lines

How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents for the Workplace

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By Gordon W. E. Nore
with a foreword by Peter Calamai
and an afterword by Mary J. Breen

Produced by Learning in the Workplace, Frontier College, 1991

Clear Lines:

How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents for the Workplace

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Preface

In January 1988 Frontier College received funding from Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) for a project called Learning in the Workplace (LWP). The goal of LWP was to develop materials and program models to assist Canadian workers who have trouble reading, writing, and using numbers. As part of its contract with EIC, LWP set up programs within several companies across Canada.

During this process we began to realize that many people have to read an enormous amount of material at work. We also noticed that much of the material is hard to read. We felt it would be helpful to train people in the workplace to write more clearly. We believed that this would help not only workers who have difficulty reading, but also those who read well.

The *Clear Lines* Workshops were very successful. Many people, not only from industry, but also government agencies, school boards, literacy groups, and individuals, have attended *Clear Lines* Workshops. The guide you now hold in your hands is based on those workshops. While we recommend that you seek training in clear language, this book will help you get started.

Gordon W.E. Nore
Frontier College, Toronto
January 1991

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am indebted to Mary J. Breen. Not only did Mary write the afterword, she also observed our workshop and thoroughly reviewed the guide in its early stages.

Peter Calamai generously agreed to write the foreword to *Clear Lines*.

The seed for *Clear Lines* was planted during a week-long plain writing institute in 1989 at the Centre for Professional Writing, University of Waterloo. I wish to thank Professor David Goodwin, and Betty-Ann Lloyd and Gwen Davies of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

To the other members of the Learning in the Workplace project at Frontier--Brent Poulton, Kristina Staplin, and Sarah Thompson--my apologies for making you stumble over manuscripts in my office for two years.

I thank Miria Ioannou, Frontier's program director, whose extensive editing and publishing experience has been vital to this project.

Several Frontier staff members have attended various *Clear Lines* Workshops and helped to shape the materials. They are: Christine Camilleri, Joy Evans, Sandra Huehn, Ed Wadley, Philip Fernandez, Suzanne Long, Stephanie Baker, and Mizan Ibrahim.

To our production team--editor, Karen Miller; artist, Barbara Bailey; and production coordinator, Tom Scanlan--it is always a pleasure to work with you.

To Blanche Axton and Tucker Axton-Nore, I owe many thanks, weeknights, and Saturday afternoons.

Finally, to Employment and Immigration Canada, many thanks for its support of the Learning in the Workplace project.

Gordon W.E. Nore
Frontier College, Toronto
January 1991

Foreword by Peter Calamai

Consider a current TV ad by a telephone company. Two business executives are about to rip out one another's lungs. Sales blames engineering because customers are returning gizmos that keep busting because the customers can't follow the instructions. But engineering says the gizmos are fabulous. Just before the fists fly, the telephone company rep peers around the office door. Both guys make it clear that she is wasting their time. But wait! Why not, she suggests, have the baffled customers call you free for advice, using an 800 number. Light bulbs click on! Result: fewer returned gizmos, and bigger phone bills.

But how come no one ever asks, "Why don't we just write clearly in the first place?" After all, Canadians used to...

Sixty years ago, federal health officials wanted to calm fears about a terrible disease then called Infantile Paralysis. In a 30-page pamphlet they managed to say simply what was known about polio, as we now call the disease, and to describe clearly how it could be treated. That pamphlet could be understood by anyone with primary school education.

Fast forward to last year. Canada's ten premiers issued a public communiqué after their annual gathering, a vital document dealing with the economy and the fate of constitutional reform. To understand that communiqué required a university education. There were piles of polysyllables, layers of legalese, and jungles of jargon.

What's happening here? Do political leaders want to hogtie understanding? Are only an elite allowed to comprehend the issues of the day?

Nor is government the major culprit. Read almost any corporate explanation of employee benefits, try to fill in any form from a local social agency, review the public health pamphlets about

AIDS--piles of polysyllables, layers of legalese, and jungles of jargon.

One of the biggest revelations in the Southam Literacy survey in 1987 wasn't that 40 percent of people with low literacy had problems understanding business and government publications; it was that 20 percent of fully literate Canadians reported the same difficulty.

The message here is strikingly simple: clear writing benefits everyone, not just those with literacy problems. In particular, it usually benefits the authors.

What manufacturer wants to make it difficult for customers to use its product effectively? What manager wants to pay more employees to correct forms that haven't been filled in properly? What politician wants to be defeated because voters didn't understand his or her policies? Or because the *reporters* didn't understand and messed up the explanations in print and on the airwaves?

I won't claim that *Clear Lines* will save government leaders from electoral defeats. Nor even that following its sensible advice will give one company's gizmo an advantage over another's. But it just might keep the phone bills down.

Peter Calamai
January 1991
Ottawa, Ontario

Writers

Gordon W.E. Nore is a teacher, writer and, since 1988, a member of the Learning in the Workplace project team at Frontier College. He has taught English as a Second Language, business and professional writing, and literacy at the School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto; the York University English Language Institute; George Brown, Seneca, and Humber colleges. He is the author of several articles and publications on literacy.

Three time winner of the National Newspaper Award, Peter Calamai is the editorial page editor of *The Ottawa Citizen* newspaper. In 1987, he directed a national literacy survey for Southam News and wrote a 40-part newspaper series based on the results, later published as the booklet *Broken Words*. The literacy series was selected for the Michener Award for meritorious public service.

Mary J. Breen is the author of *Taking Care*, a handbook of easy-to-read health information for women. Mary has been a health worker and a teacher of both Literacy and English as an Additional Language. She has been working as a consultant on clear writing since 1987.

Introduction

More than one in three Canadians has some difficulty with everyday reading in the community, at home, and at work (Statistics Canada, 1990). A recent survey by the Conference Board of Canada reports that almost 40 percent of employers interviewed feel that their employee's reading abilities directly affect health and safety, promotions, training, and hiring (Des Lauriers, 1989).

The literacy issue in Canada is misunderstood.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of the literacy task is not only to educate those who cannot read, but also those who can. Confusion continues to hinder the progress of literacy in Canada. Many assume, for example, that we are talking only about people who are unable to read anything at all. The literacy problem in Canada is far more complex, but many agree that meeting the following goals will improve the situation:

- help students to stay in school longer
- provide more access to literacy for people of all ages
- build literacy into existing services
- understand and deal with the causes of literacy problems
- improve people's access to information regardless of reading levels or education.

Unclear Language

At the same time, however, much of what we write may be very difficult for people to read. We forget that not everyone reads at the same level. Even those of us who read well may find certain things harder to read than others. Unclear language--or gobbledegook, babblespeak, legalese--is a barrier to clear communication for all.

This is a guide about clear language in the workplace. We designed it as a companion to the *Clear Lines* Workshop at Frontier College. We wrote it for people who are concerned about literacy and clear communication at work. The materials and activities in this book will help you learn to design documents, memos, letters, and bulletins for people in your workplace who may have trouble with reading and writing.

...THIS NEW CORVETTE ARTICLE AT FIRST GLANCE SEEMS PEDANTIC AND HEAVY-HANDED, BUT THE SUBSEQUENT INTRODUCTION OF AN ALTRUISTIC APPROACH TO THE SUSPENSION AND STEERING MECHANISM ENABLES IT TO SURPASS AND TRANSCEND THE USUAL SPORTS CAR RHETORIC.
...THANK HEAVENS.
FIRARO
Many of us use unclear language.

A word of caution...

We are not suggesting that clear language is a substitute for literacy education. However, some difficulty that people have with reading can be eased by documents that are prepared in a clear fashion. Further, we are not suggesting that you should use clear language only for those people who may have reading problems. Rather, we recommend that you use clear language so that people with reading problems will still be included in your readership. Finally, we believe that the basic principles of clear language will challenge you, the writer, to understand the needs, strengths, and abilities of your audience. That understanding, we feel, will help you be a better writer.

This guide has four main components:

Part One:
Literacy in Canada and the Importance of Clear Language

Part Two:
The Basic Principles of Clear Writing

Part Three:
Clear Design

Part Four:
The Clear Writer Goes to Work

Please note...

Although this guide contains examples of poorly written documents that you will have the opportunity to correct, you should remember that clear language is not simply an editing process for documents that have already been written. Rather, we recommend that you treat it as an approach to composing these documents.

A few words about language...

In this book we have tried to be very careful about how we use certain words and phrases that describe how well people read, write, or use numbers. We have taken care because we feel that words that describe people's skills and abilities should not be used to describe people. Therefore you will not see words such as "illiterate" or "illiterates." We believe that people who currently have trouble reading, writing, or using numbers are able to learn. They simply have not had a suitable opportunity.

Part One:
Literacy in Canada
and the Importance of Clear Language

Introduction

Millions of Canadians have not learned to read, write, or use numbers well enough to meet the demands of everyday life. What are the dimensions of the literacy issue in Canada? What is the impact of low literacy on the workplace? How can clear language help?

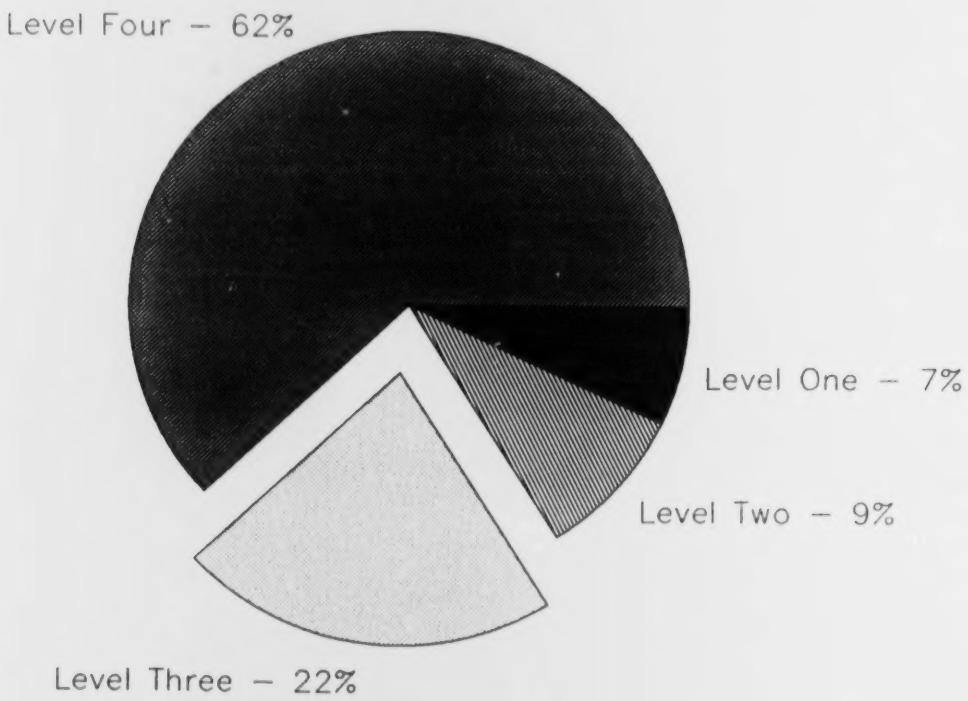
Content

- Literacy in Canada
- Job-Related Literacy Skills
- The Importance of Clear Language
- The Philosophy of *Clear Lines*

Literacy in Canada

Reading Levels of Adult Canadians Aged 16-69.

Note: The pie represents approximately 20 million adults. The survey does not include native Indians living on reserves, Canadian Armed Forces personnel, residents of the Yukon or Northwest Territories, or individuals living within prisons, nursing homes, or any other institutions.



(Source: Statistics Canada, 1990)

Literacy in Canada

What do the reading levels mean?

- Level One: (1.2 million) People at this level found most daily reading materials nearly impossible to deal with.
- Level Two: (1.8 million) People at this level can read simple words that are familiar to them in daily life.
- Level Three: (4 million) People at this level can read everyday materials if they are written simply, clearly laid out, and if they involve tasks that are easy to perform.
- Level Four: Canadians at this level can do most daily reading without difficulty.

Some examples of reading activities Canadians could not do.

Level of Difficulty	Task	% of people that could not complete the task
Level One:	Sign a social insurance card	1
Level Two:	Circle the expiry date on a driver's licence	6
	Locate correct building using a sign	7
	Circle the charge on a telephone bill	10
Level Three:	Read aspirin instructions	20
	Find a store in the Yellow Pages	25
Level Four:	Find school hours in a pamphlet	41

(Source: Statistics Canada, 1990)

Literacy in Canada

What are the barriers to full literacy?

- Lack of education
- Segregated education
- Streaming
- Poverty
- Lack of physical access
- Discrimination based on age, race, sex, language, or physical or intellectual challenge

As of 1987 Canada's literacy programs were able to accommodate, at best, two percent of people with a literacy problem (Calamai, 1987). The majority of people placed at level three or lower in the Statistics Canada survey do not see themselves as having a literacy problem. Very few adults with literacy problems sign up for literacy programs. Why?

- Stigma of illiteracy
- Lack of daycare
- Work commitments
- Lack of services
- Lack of funding

Job-Related Literacy Skills

Today many Canadians have to read more and more at work. What is the difference between the way many of us were taught to read at school and the way we must read at work?

A high school junior (U.S.) reads...	**A blue collar worker (U.S.) reads...**
...60 minutes a day	...97 minutes a day
...in blocks of time	...for short periods
...to learn	...to do

(Source: Mickulecky, 1980)

People are not less skilled at reading than they were a generation ago. If anything, the reading abilities of Canadians have improved. The problem is that many people have to read more than ever before if they are to participate more fully at home, in the community, and at work. In many workplaces reading is vital to health and safety, productivity and training.

What do we read at work?

- Personnel forms
- WHMIS materials*
- Statistical process control
- Training manuals
- Work dockets
- Collective agreements
- Operating instructions
- Memos

* The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System

Government Publications

Some public information is very hard to read. These are estimates of the readability of some government documents. Readability tools are discussed on page 40.

Document	Years of school required to read
Federal	
• 1931 polio pamphlet	5-7
• 1987 free trade publicity kit	13-17
• How to look for a job	5-6
• How to apply for a SIN	13-17+
• Defence recruiting pamphlet	13-17+
• Family Allowance inserts	10-12+
British Columbia	
• Workers rights and benefits	13-15
Newfoundland	
• Nutrition and farm pamphlets	13-15
Ontario	
• Ontario W.C.B.	16-17+
• Legal advice for citizens	7-9
• Senior citizen's guide	11-12
• Babysitter's pamphlet	7-8
• Drug abuse information	9-10

(Source: Calamai, 1987)

The Importance of Clear Language

Who can clear language help?

People with some reading ability...

According to the Statistics Canada survey twenty-two percent of Canadians are able to read *only* if the material is clearly written and designed. Clear language materials will not directly help people with very limited literacy. However, they can make it easier for them to learn from others if they have clear, readable materials.

People who do not see well...

Older adults who are losing some of their sight often complain about small print and unnecessarily long words.

People who are learning English as their second language...

Newcomers can continue to improve their reading skills if more readable material is available.

People who read well...

Many people who are able to read do not read because the material is too difficult or too long. Clear language encourages people to read.

The Philosophy of *Clear Lines*

Every profession has its own language and vocabulary. But when we are writing for people outside of our profession, we often forget that much of our everyday language is meaningless jargon to others. We also may forget that not everyone reads at the same level. You can make it easier for your readers to understand you by using clear language.

If you can't understand it, it was probably written by a lawyer.

Will Rogers

Some critics believe that clear language lowers the intelligence of society. They forget how urgent it is for people to have access to important information.

It's OK to rewrite computer manuals, it's OK to have a Plain English law for well-off people to understand their mortgages, but when I want the food stamp applications written more simply, I'm accused of wanting to 'dummy down' things.

Mike Fox,
Executive Director,
Push Literacy Action Now
Washington, D.C.

The Philosophy of *Clear Lines*

We do not want to simplify or 'dummy down' the world. We want people to be able to use the information they need at work to stay healthy, safe, and effective.

Clear language lets the message come through with the greatest of ease.

Professor Robert Eagleson,
Australian clear language expert

There is more to clear language than simplifying text to a lower reading level. The clear writer truly understands his or her audience.

While clear, straightforward language is certainly an important component of any text's readability, it is not a sufficient test. The language must also reflect the everyday life of the reader in terms of culture, educational level, employment situation, income level, family structure, race, and sex.

Betty-Ann Lloyd,
Nova Scotia clear language expert

Review of Part One

In this section we have covered the following:

Literacy in Canada

There is no clear distinction that says one part of the population is literate, and the other is not. Many Canadians who have difficulty reading challenging material are still able to read to some degree.

Job-Related Literacy Skills

People have to read a great deal at work today. Not only is there more to read, but many materials are quite hard to read.

The Importance of Clear Language

The Statistics Canada survey suggests that up to 22 percent of the population between the ages of 16 and 69 are able to use documents that are clearly written and relate to daily life. These are people whom we may be missing in our daily writing. These also may be people who can help others with less literacy to understand written materials.

The Philosophy of *Clear Lines*

Clear Lines is based on the writer's respect for the reader. It is not only about simplifying materials for an audience, but making materials useful for the target audience.

Part Two:
The Basic Principles of Clear Writing

Introduction

Some ways of writing are easier to read than others. This section will teach you some of the tools for writing clearly, measuring writing for clear language, and a formula for estimating reading grade levels of your writing.

Content

- The Low-Impact 20-minute Grammar Workout
- The Benefits of Clear Writing
- The Clear Writer's Hit List
- Measuring Reading Grade Levels
- Beyond Clarity: Relevance

The Low-Impact 20-minute Grammar Workout

Before we begin, let's review some basic principles of grammar. You do not need to be a grammar expert to use clear language. In fact, a knowledge of grammar rules does not guarantee that you will be a clear writer. However, you may find a little background knowledge useful when you reach The Clear Writer's Hit List later in the section. If, however, you feel comfortable about your knowledge of grammar, then skip to page 28.

Sentences

1. Every sentence has a subject and a verb. For example:

Our training	begins at 9:00 p.m.
Subject	*Verb*

2. Some sentences have an object, which takes the action from the verb. For example:

Frontier College	will host	our training.
Subject	*Verb*	*Object*

3a. Some sentences have a completion that stands for the subject. For example:

Mr. K. Larity	is	our instructor.
Our instructor	is	Mr. K. Larity.
Subject	*Verb*	*Completion*

3b. Some sentences have a completion that describes the subject. For example:

Our session	was	small.
Subject	*Verb*	*Completion*

So every sentence looks something like this:

S V (O/C)

For example:

The only person who can do this training	is unable to attend.
Subject	*Verb*

We	would like to know	who has done this training.
Subject	*Verb*	*Object*

We	believe	that we can train our own people.
Subject	*Verb*	*Object*

We	are	the only people who can do the training.
Subject	*Verb*	*Complement*

The person who can do the training	is	John.
Subject	*Verb*	*Complement*

Subjects and objects are made with...

nouns - John, Canada, trainer, learning
noun phrases - the only person
noun clauses - that we have the resources to train our people
pronouns - I, he, we, it, each

Verbs are made with action words...

verbs - am, is, learn, do

Nouns are modified by...

adjectives - tall, seven, long
adjective phrases - a very difficult
adjective clauses - who can do the training
prepositional phrases - a woman **of influence**

Verbs are modified by...

adverbs - quickly, early
adverb phrases - very quickly
prepositional phrases - in the morning

In brief...

- Subjects are made with nouns or pronouns, and are modified by adjectives.
- Verbs are made with action words, which are modified by adverbs.
- Objects are made with nouns or pronouns, and are modified by adjectives.
- Complements can be nouns standing for the subject, or adjectives describing the subject.

The Benefits of Clear Writing

What makes clear writing clear? The idea must be delivered from writer to reader in the shortest possible time. There is no trickery to clear language. It is just common sense.

Clear writing...

...reduces word count per sentence.

More words means more time spent reading and more opportunities to become confused. Complex phrases and sentence structures distract the reader from the meaning and the intent of the writing.

...reduces word length (in syllables).

When suffixes are added to a root word, it usually spells trouble for the reader. The word, *operat(e)-ion-al-ize,* is a good example.

...simplifies the order of sentences SV(O/C).

Inverted sentence order takes longer to read because it is not the way we talk. The reader often has to reread and rephrase the text to make it sound like spoken English.

...restores action to sentences.

Inactive writing encourages inaction. The sentence should DO what you want your readers to DO.

...speaks directly to intended reader.

This avoids confusion.

...simplifies verb tense/time.

Ask any English teacher. Most grammatical errors are committed in this area. It stands to reason that this will confuse more readers.

The Clear Writer's Hit List

These are general guidelines for clear writing. Each one is explained carefully on the following pages.

1. Write directly to your reader. Avoid the third person.

2. Don't change verbs into nouns.

3. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.

4. Use the active (not the passive) voice.

5. Write complete sentences only when it makes sense to do so.

6. List critical points apart from the text.

7. List items in a parallel (the same grammatical) form.

8. Use a positive tone wherever possible.

9. Avoid using jargon.

10. Explain difficult words in their context.

The Clear Writer's Hit List

1. Write directly to your reader. Avoid the third person.

This applies to both the text and the salutation (e.g. "Dear..." or "To:"). If your readers are not sure that you are writing to them directly, they may not remember the message. Avoid the third person.

First person: I, we, us, our, mine, etc.
Second person: you, your, yours, etc.
Third person: they, all employees, all staff, it, them, etc.

For example:

Before Clear Language

All employees are required to list flawed products in the work log at the end of each hour of work.

After Clear Language

To: All Employees

Please list all your flawed products in your work log after every hour you work.

2. Don't change verbs into nouns.

This adds more clutter to sentences and usually makes them less active.

Verbs	Nouns
decide	decision
determine	determination
examine	examination
inspect	inspection
direct	direction

For example:

Before Clear Language

All decisions about the dispensation of subsidies for outside education will be the prerogative of the president's office.

After Clear Language

The president will decide whether or not the company will pay for your outside courses.

3. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.

If you have small children who are learning how to talk, you already know this. If you say to your toddler, "Before you go to bed, remember to brush your teeth," you may find her in bed with her toothbrush. Instead you might say, "Brush your teeth before you go to bed."

For example:

Before Clear Language

Before returning your time sheets, please make sure they have been authorized by your supervisor.

After Clear Language

Ask your supervisor to authorize your time sheets before you turn them in.

4. Use the active voice.

In passive voice sentences the "doer" of the action is unknown. This may be confusing for people who have trouble reading. It is also confusing for people who are learning English, since other languages may not have a similar structure. Passive constructions are often weak and awkward and should be substituted with the more direct active voice.*

Passive Voice	Active Voice
The lead wires must *be checked...*	Check the lead wires...
The office phone *is not to be used...*	Do not use...

For example:

Before Clear Language

The coffee pot must be washed every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

After Clear Language

Please make sure that you wash the coffee pot every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

*Sometimes you have to use the passive voice, especially if the "doer" is unknown or unimportant.

5. Write complete sentences only when it makes sense to do so.

Years of schooling have taught us that we must write everything in complete sentences. So, if the examination question read, "When was the war of 1812 fought?" we dutifully wrote, "The war of 1812 was fought in 1812."

For example:

Before Clear Language

The normal working day begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 5:00 p.m. There are two coffee breaks, lasting fifteen minutes apiece, at 10:15 a.m. and 3:15 p.m. Lunch periods are sixty minutes and begin at 12:00 noon.

After Clear Language

9:00 a.m.	Work begins
10:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	Coffee Break
12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
3:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.	Coffee Break
5:00 p.m.	Work day ends

6. List critical points apart from the text.

Burying important details such as dates, times, and places inside a paragraph is a leading cause of missed meetings.

For example:

Before Clear Language

All employees are requested to return the enclosed reply cards by the due date, stating their interests in attending a company golf tournament on June 17.

The tournament will be held at the Horseshoe Valley Golf Club and should be an ideal morale booster for the entire organization.

The company will cover half the costs of golfing and the dinner following the tournament, so that each employee will be requested to pay $20 for the day...

After Clear Language

The First Annual Company Golf Tournament

Date:	June 17, 1991
Place:	Horseshoe Valley Golf Club
Price:	$20 (The company will pay the other $20)
Sign-up:	May 31, 1990

For more information: Call Susan at personnel (extension #324).

7. List items in parallel (the same grammatical) form.

Strictly speaking, this is a more correct style of writing. More importantly, parallel structure helps your readers find the meaning of the written material more quickly because they do not need to decode as much information.

For example:

Before Clear Language

Employees made the following suggestions to the employee suggestion box:

- Redesign of the paint line
- Moving the water cooler to the employee lounge
- Let's have the Christmas party at the Holiday Inn

After Clear Language

Employees suggested the following changes this month:

- Redesign the paint line
- Move the water cooler to the employee lounge
- Have the Christmas party at the Holiday Inn

You could also write...

- To redesign the paint line
- To move the water cooler to the employee lounge
- To have the Christmas party at the Holiday Inn

8. Use a positive tone wherever possible.

Negative tones turn your reader off. Perhaps you are writing in a negative fashion because of something that went wrong. In any case, it is better that you tell people what you want them to do, rather than what you do not want them to do.

For example:

Before Clear Language

Do not place mileage expense forms in the travel expense file.

After Clear Language

Place mileage expense forms in the mileage forms file, not in the travel expense file.

9. Avoid using jargon.

Every profession, job, trade, or field of interest has its own unique vocabulary. Many have their own way of writing. This works well enough when people from a given field talk to each other. The problem occurs when they use jargon to communicate with someone outside the field. Often, jargon is unnecessary, but writers use it thinking it will make them sound "official."

For example:

Before Clear Language

Strict and vigilant compliance with the aforementioned safety regulations will ensure the continued health and safety of all concerned.

After Clear Language

Please follow these rules carefully for your safety and your co-workers' safety.

10. Explain difficult words in their context.

Difficult words are not simply long or technical vocabulary. They can be words that have a very specific meaning in a given context. Explaining is not simply giving a definition. It is finding a way of relating the word to your reader's experience.

For example:

Before Clear Language

Make sure the grapplesnappits are securely flanged.

After Clear Language

Make sure the lids (grapplesnappits) are securely sealed, using the flanging machine.

Measuring Reading Grade Levels

In this section you will learn how to use a readability tool called the S.M.O.G. (Simple Measure of Gobbledegook) (McLaughlin, 1969). Readability tools, like the S.M.O.G., place documents at a reading grade level based on sentence and text length in syllables. Many writers make the mistake of depending on readability formulas. This is very tempting since they give a number answer. We believe, however, that you should not rely on them entirely for the following reasons:

- It is possible to "doctor" an unclear text to get a good grade-level score and still have a difficult text.
- A readability test does not reflect the needs of the reader.
- The grade level a person has reached is not always a good measure of their reading abilities.
- Readability tools can give you a general idea of the problem, but they cannot tell you exactly where the problem is.
- A readability tool can give you a false sense of security.

In other words, a formula may tell you whether or not you have a problem, but not how to solve it. However, these tools are useful if you wish to make a survey of reading materials in your workplace.

How to Use the S.M.O.G Readability Formula

If the text has 30 or more sentences:

1. Count off 10 consecutive sentences at the beginning, in the middle, and near the end of the text. Skip titles and headings; just use text.

2. In this sample of 30 sentences, mark all polysyllabic words (words of 3 syllables or more).

3. Total the number of polysyllabic words.

4. Find the nearest square root of this total.

5. Add a constant of 3 to the square root. This gives you the reading level a person must have to understand the text.

If the text has less than 30 sentences:

1. Count all the polysyllabic words in the text.

2. Count the number of sentences.

3. Find the average number of polysyllabic words per sentence:

   average = Total # of polysyllabic words divided by...
   Total # of sentences

4. Multiply that average by the number of sentences short of 30. (For example, if you have 18 sentences, multiply by 12.)

5. Add that figure to the total number of polysyllabic words.

6. Find the square root and add the constant of 3.

Additional Guidelines for Using the S.M.O.G.

- Hyphenated words are considered one word.
- Numbers that are in numeric form should be pronounced to determine if they are polysyllabic. (Example: 337 has 8 syllables.)
- Proper nouns, if polysyllabic, should be counted too.
- Abbreviations should be read as unabbreviated to determine if they are polysyllabic. (Example: ON, for Ontario, has four syllables.)
- Include the repetitions of the same word, no matter how often it is used.
- The grade level is accurate to +/- 1.5 grades.

See pages 64-72 for examples of unclear writing. Try using the S.M.O.G on these. Answers are on page 81.

Beyond Clarity: Relevance

Try the following scenario:

Your company, Acme Screw and Gear, is launching an Employee Involvement Program. (An employee involvement program gives all workers more control over their jobs. Usually, they must plan long- and short-term goals in teams. They must also solve problems and evaluate their own progress.) You're going to rent training videos, buy all the *One-Minute Manager* books, and go to the Association of Quality and Participation meetings. You have to write a piece for the company's Newsletter, *Nuts and Bolts*, to announce and promote the program.

Note: You are not actually writing the piece at this point. You are just thinking about some of the issues you will need to consider for the article.

Consider the following themes raised by Betty-Ann Lloyd on page 21, and ask yourself these questions:

- How could these issues affect the relevance of your piece?
- Is clear writing going to be enough to get your message across?

Culture

_____

_____

Educational level

_____

_____

_____

Employment situation

Income level

Family structure

Race

Sex

Some Guidelines for Relevant Writing

- If you are explaining a difficult concept, be sure to use practical examples that relate to your readers' experience.
- Innumeracy is a problem that you may not be aware of. Be careful in the way that you use numbers and statistics. Once again, use examples.
- Get people you know and trust from your audience to review your work.
- Read your work aloud. Your work should sound like a typical conversation you might have with your reader.

And some additional pointers...

- When writing during a crisis situation, be sure that you are not being too reactionary. Do not let your hostility or anger guide you.
- Make it an in-house policy to check important documents before they are passed along. Get a buddy system started.
- Look for alternatives to writing (video, person-to-person contact).
- Before you write another policy memo, ask yourself if it is time to dust off the employee manual and revise it.

Review of Part Two

In this section we have covered the following:

The Low-Impact 20-minute Grammar Workout

We reviewed some of the basic grammar and syntax rules. Remember that being a grammar expert does not guarantee clear writing.

The Benefits of Clear Language

This section showed the advantages of using shorter words and simpler sentence structures.

The Clear Writer's Hit List

These are very simple tools that will help make your message clear. Remember, however, that unless your work is organized and carefully thought out, clear writing tips will not help.

Measuring Reading Grade Levels

A readability formula, such as the S.M.O.G., gives you a rough idea of the reading level of your writing. However, it is not an absolute measure, nor does it offer any solutions.

Beyond Clarity: Relevance

Being relevant is the greatest challenge you face as a writer. It is essential that you know your audience if you want to communicate effectively.

Part Three:
Clear Design

Introduction

The design of the document can affect its readability. Excessive or inappropriate use of type sizes, fonts, and features can be very distracting to your reader. This problem often occurs when the writer has sophisticated word-processing equipment and becomes carried away with using it. Indeed, you will find that you can accomplish good results with simple equipment. In other words, less is often more.

Content

- Formatting the Page
- Selecting Fonts
- Selecting Features

Formatting the Page

Justified Margins

Justified text gives a straight margin on the right as well as the left side of the page. It is harder to read because the spaces between words are not all the same.

Centred Text

Placing you titles and headings at the centre of the page is fine. You should not, however, centre text because it is harder for your readers to find the beginning of each line.

Left Flush

This is the easiest format to read. The spaces between words are all the same, and your readers will be able to move from one line to the next more easily.

Columns

Justified Columns are the hardest to read. With some printers you will find that words are split a c r o s s the column.

Ragged Columns are a bit easier to read. However you should limit the number of columns to two for a standard 8.5" by 11" page.

Some Guidelines for Formatting

Spacing

- Double space between lines whenever possible. The more white space, the easier your page is to read.
- If single spaced, use a double space between paragraphs.
- When using bullets, don't use a semicolon at the end. They are not necessary and may confuse the reader.
- Leave at least a one-inch margin around the page.
- Avoid using columns, especially narrow, justified ones.

Also

- Use block style for memos and letters. No centred text--all text runs from the same margin, left to right.
- Indent important information only.
- Use a second page if necessary, rather than cramming too much text into one page.

Selecting Fonts

Serif Fonts

Times Roman 10 point

Times Roman 12 point

Times Roman 16 point

Times Roman 35 point

Courier 8 point

Courier 10 point

Courier 12 point

Courier 12 point

Courier 16 point

Courier 18 point

Sans Serif Fonts

Helvetica 10 point

Helvetica 12 point

Helvetica 16 point

Helvetica 35 point

Some Guidelines for Selecting Fonts

- Use a serif font wherever possible, as they are easier to read.
- Try not to use more than one or two fonts in a piece of text.
- If possible, use at least a 12 point font, larger for overheads.
- Make sure your italics are not smaller than your standard fonts.
- Watch out for fonts that are too ornate. They are harder to read.

Selecting Features*

- Underline
- Double underline
- **Bold**
- ~~Strike-Out~~
- Shadow
- *Italic*
- SMALL CAPS
- Red Line
- Outline

* WordPerfect 5.0 - Other word processing software\systems may vary.

Some Guidelines for Selecting Features

The following are some examples of the dangers of excess:

- Try not to use too many features within a given text.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA.

- Avoid block or upper case style for text. When words are capitalized they lose their shape and are harder to read. You may, of course, capitalize headings.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA.

- When underlining be sure that the underline does not obscure the text.

This is not a good idea.

- Complete your document before you begin to *add* **features** and **formatting.**

- Be consistent with the features you choose for headings.

Review of Part Three

In this section we have covered the following:

Formatting the Page

Generally it is better to have plenty of white space and a clean simple format. Incidentally, this technique is helpful also for people whose eye sight is declining. Right ragged margins are easier to read than justified margins.

Selecting Fonts

Limit yourself to one or two fonts for a given text. Try to use 12 point or larger.

Features

Once again, less is more. Too many features can obscure the words and may confuse your reader.

Part Four:
The Clear Writer Goes to Work

Introduction

You may now know more about clear language and design, but that is only half the battle. When you return to the office, you may have to sell the issue to your co-workers. Even when you've won your converts, you will still have to decide how and where your company can benefit from clear language.

Content

- Who's in My Corner?
- Steps for Implementing Clear Language at Work

Who's in My Corner?

When you return to your workplace after reading this guide, you will be eager to share what you have learned. You'll need to take stock of your organization and develop a strategy. Start by asking yourself the following questions:

Who will be supportive of implementing clear language?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who will be resistant to implementing clear language?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How can I assure their support?

What resources do I have to help me implement clear language?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How can I convince them?

What resources do I need to implement clear language?

How can I get them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Steps for Implementing Clear Language at Work

1. Gather supporters together; form a *Clear Lines Task Force.*
2. Poll employees, and ask what communication changes they would like.
3. Gather samples and assess them for readability problems.
4. Prepare a report that illustrates the benefits of clear language.
5. If accepted, choose one department for a pilot program.

1. Gather supporters together; form a *Clear Lines Task Force.*

- Set goals for your group.
- Be upbeat about your work.
- Make sure people know about the task force, and make yourself available for questions.
- Collect writing samples and articles about clear language.
- Be an example for others to follow.

2. Poll employees, and ask what communication changes they would like.

- Carry out informal surveys of your organization's communication systems and networks.
- Look for good writers as allies.
- Don't ask people to come forward with reading problems. Simply ask them for suggestions on improving documents.

3. **Gather samples and assess them for readability problems.**

- Use the Clear Writer's Hit List (page 29) to identify problem areas. (Try to use anonymous examples of writing, so no one feels confronted.)
- Use the S.M.O.G. readability formula (page 41) on a random cross-section of writing samples. (Note: Be careful not to over-emphasize grade level data.)
- Gather anecdotal information on communication problems.
- Develop possible scenarios that could result from unclear writing.
- Write a brief for senior managers emphasizing the benefits of clear language policy.

4. **Prepare a report that illustrates the benefits of clear language.**

- Use a format such as:
  FINDINGS...IMPLICATIONS...RECOMMENDATIONS...
- Try not to point fingers at guilty parties. Emphasize improvement rather than correction.
- Have your action plan clearly spelled out.

5. **If accepted, choose one department for a pilot program.**

- Get a campaign going, with incentives if possible.
- Acknowledge clear writing and encourage others to do so as well.
- Develop materials and examples for training.

- Offer training as a free benefit.
- Emphasize clear language, not plain language.
- Plan a follow-up report to senior management to expand the program.

Can you think of anything else you should do?

Review of Part Four

In this section we have covered the following:

Who's in My Corner?

If you want to make changes in your organization, you can't work alone.

Steps for Implementing Clear Language at Work

You must be positive and promote clear language rather than criticize people for unclear language.

Afterword by Mary J. Breen

With the privilege of writing the afterword for *Clear Lines* comes the advantage of having the last word. And the last word on clear writing must be the vital importance of working with your audience to produce materials that are readable and relevant. In my opinion, you cannot write clear, useful materials unless you take final direction from your audience.

The importance of feedback lies in the fact that, when we write, we tend to produce materials that are most suitable for people just like ourselves. However, as a writer of clear materials, you are often going to write materials for people who are different from you....

- If you are in management, then your job may be to write for people with different jobs and different skills from yours.
- If you are a health professional, then your job may be to write for people with less knowledge about the technical aspects of health care.
- If you are a skilled reader, then your job may be to write for less skilled readers.

Whatever your job, your audience may have a different culture, a different use of language, a different income, a different way of learning, different problems, and different solutions; in essence, your audience may have very different life experiences from yours.

As writers, it is essential that we avoid making assumptions about the lives of our audience. To avoid this, we need to understand who our audience is as well as possible; for example, what they want to learn--as opposed to what we want to teach; how they prefer to learn--from written materials or through other media; how they use language--what words and phrases are most

useful and familiar to them; and, very importantly, how well they can read. You can obtain this information from people who represent your audience and from people who know your audience better than you do. With better understanding of the lives of your audience, you can produce materials that better reflect their lives.

The last step in working with your audience is in many ways the most important, and certainly the most neglected--field testing. Field testing requires you to ask your audience to assess the value of your work. Field testing will tell you:

- if your audience wants to read it
- if they can read it
- if it makes sense in their lives
- and, if your work does not meet the test, it will give you some essential directions regarding how to revise your work until it does.

No readability formula and no colleague can give you the crucial feedback that your audience can; only your readers can tell you if your writing is relevant and readable, useful and acceptable.

They must be the final test.

Mary J. Breen
January 1991
Peterborough, Ontario

Resources

Introduction

Up to this point you've learned some of the basics of clear language. Following are some resources to help you get more information, improve your skills, and encourage others to use clear language also.

Content

- Samples of Unclear Writing from Acme Screw & Gear*
- A List of Simplified Words and Phrases
- Further Reading on Literacy and Clear Language
- Other Sources of Information on Clear Language
- Other *Clear Lines* Resources
- Readability Estimates of Sample Documents

* Note: Acme Screw & Gear is not a real company. The samples that appear on pages 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 are actual documents from companies. Any information that might identify the writers or the companies they work for has been changed. The documents appear as they did in their original form. We have reduced them by up to 25%. All errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation have not been changed from the originals.

Before Clear Language

Title is vague. This may be standard procedure, but it seems to be new information.

The "SUBJECT:" line is also vague.

Sentence # 1 is too long and confusing (for example: "forbids unlawful harassment").

Paragraph # 1 presumes that the reader has a very large vocabulary.

Paragraph # 1 does not address anyone in particular. What does "priority basis" mean?

Paragraph # 3 is just one sentence.

Paragraph # 4 is too "legal" sounding. Block style is hard to read.

Difficult words:

harassment
implied or expressed
verbal
intimidating
objectionable
expeditious
utmost discretion
frank (honest)
disciplinary

Summary

The language is very legal.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

STANDARD PROCEDURE

SUBJECT: HARASSMENT/SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Acme Screw and Gear has established a strict policy which forbids unlawful harassment of employees, including implied or expressed forms of sexual harassment by any of its employees, managers, customers or suppliers, as detailed in The Ontario Human Rights Code of Ontario. This includes verbal, written, visual or physical acts that are offensive in nature, intimidating, unwelcome, or that could reasonably be taken as objectionable.

Any employee who feels that he or she has been legitimately subjected to harassment of any type, whether by a co-worker, supervisor or visitor of the Company should promptly report the incident to the Personnel Manager. The Personnel Manager will investigate on a priority basis in order to resolve or correct the situation in an expeditious manner.

Employees having any questions concerning this policy or its administration should contact the Personnel Manager for a confidential and frank discussion, and employees are assured that the utmost discretion will be used in handling of such matters.

ACME STRONGLY DISAPPROVES OF ANY FORM OF HARASSMENT/SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORK PLACE, INCLUDING ACTS OF NON-EMPLOYEES. DISCIPLINARY ACTION WILL BE TAKEN PROMPTLY AGAINST ANY EMPLOYEE, SUPERVISORY OR OTHERWISE, ENGAGING IN UNLAWFUL HARASSMENT/SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

After Clear Language

"Copies to..." Since this is a sensitive issue, employees should know that a variety of people can provide information or assistance. This also shows that there is a united front.

The "RE:" line shows that the two topics are different but related.

The memo defines harassment and sexual harassment by addressing readers directly.

The definition also explains that harassment is against the law.

The company's position and role is much clearer.

The memo assures potential victims that action will be taken. This may also be important to those employees who do not feel this is serious.

A number of people are available for information.

A number of people are available for assistance.

If people are uncomfortable going to others at work, outside help is available.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

MEMO

DATE: March 30, 1991

TO: All Employees

FROM: Carol Hines, General Manager

RE: Harassment and Sexual Harassment

Copies to: Rena Parks, Shop Steward
Singh Samura, Personnel

==========

What is harassment and sexual harassment?

- If anyone does or says anything to you which insults you, offends you, hurts, or embarrasses you in any way, this may be harassment.

- Harassment and sexual harassment are against the law, according to the Ontario Human Rights Code.

What are the company's rules about harassment and sexual harassment?

- Acme will not allow any employee, manager, customer or supplier to harass an Acme employee.

- Acme will use legal action against anyone who harasses an Acme employee. We will support, in any way possible, any employee who has been harassed.

Do you have any questions?

- If you do not understand this policy please contact personnel, your union representative or me for more information.

- If you someone has harassed you, please contact your personnel, your union representative or me. We will be happy to help you. We will not use your name.

For more information on the Ontario Human Rights Code, contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission at the address below.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

Before Clear Language

Title is not very clear. This is only a list of "don't's" and not "do's."

Block style is hard to read. These points are important.

The rules are listed in different forms.

The individual items are too long.

Too many topics are covered in this list.

Difficult Words

discipline
sufficient reason
insubordination
intoxicated/intoxicant
loafing
horseplay
designates

Summary

The writer is trying to do too much on one page.

This might be a good time to review and change the company manual.

The writer might think about setting up meetings with employees to make sure everybody understands the rules.

The writer assumes that people understand "SANITARY rules" and "production standards."

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

NOTICE

COMPANY RULES

TO MAINTAIN PROPER DISCIPLINE, TO PROMOTE THE SAFETY AND WELFARE OF ALL EMPLOYEES, AND TO PROTECT THE COMPANY PROPERTY, THE MANAGEMENT CONSIDERS THE FOLLOWING AS SUFFICIENT REASON FOR DISMISSAL.

1. Insubordination or failing to follow the working instructions of the Foreman.

2. Entering the plant in an intoxicated condition or bringing intoxicants of any kind on the premises.

3. Any false statement in the application for employment.

4. Continually being late or absent from work without permission.

5. Producing excessive scrap or inferior parts through carelessness or inefficiency or wilfully wasting material or supplies.

6. Loafing on job or failure to produce in accordance with established production standards.

7. Fighting on Company property.

8. Wilful damage or destruction of property.

9. Any employee who registers another employee's timecard or allows their own time card to be registered or in any way temper with the registering of cards.

10. Damage to equipment through carelessness, suspension of THREE days or dismissal after a thorough investigation.

11. Disregarding safety rules and regulations:
e.g.
1. Horseplay in the plant.
2. Failing to wear safety glasses, safety shoes while in plant.
3. Failing to use safety guards on machines.
4. Running in the plant.
5. Throwing things in the plant.
6. Gloves and protective devices are to be used when handling steel parts.

THE FOLLOWING IS CONSIDERED REASON FOR DISCIPLINARY ACTION:

Employee who fails to punch time cards either IN or OUT shall be penalized 15 minutes. Any employee who is one hour or more late shall not register in, without permission of the Foreman.

Failure to observe SANITARY rules.

Employee quitting job before ringing of bell which designates starting, quitting or rest periods.

Company must be notified by telephone if Employee cannot report for work and reasons given.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

After Clear Language

The "RE:" line is more to the point.

Once again, readers know that a number of people are informed about this issue. People can choose their resources for further information.

The terms are clearly defined up-front.

All the specific terms of dismissal address the reader directly.

Writer directs readers to other sources of information rather than cram too much in one memo.

There is a clear distinction between "dismissal" and "discipline."

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

MEMO

DATE: March 30, 1991

TO: All Employees

FROM: Carol Hines, General Manager

RE: Dismissal and Discipline

Copies to: Rena Parks, Shop Steward
Singh Samura, Personnel

Dismissal

- If you do not follow certain rules, you can be let go from your job.

You may be dismissed if....

- you refuse to follow your supervisor's orders.
- you have used alcohol or illegal drugs while working.
- you are intoxicated (drunk) by alcohol or illegal drugs at work.
- you bring alcohol or illegal drugs to work.
- you are often late or absent without permission.
- you fight with anyone on company property.
- you damage company property on purpose.
- you punch in someone else's time card.
- you allow someone else to punch in your time card.
- you do not follow the safety rules
  (See page 42 - Employee Handbook).

Discipline

- If you do not follow certain rules, you may receive a discipline. A discipline may include a written or verbal (spoken) warning (See page 55 - Employee Handbook).

You may receive a discipline if...

- you do not punch your time card in or out.
- you do not follow the Sanitary Rules
  (See page 92 - Employee Handbook).
- you leave work without permission before the bell.
- you do not call in sick.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

Before Clear Language

The "RE:" line could be more specific. What is the writer going to say about safety shoes and boots?

Sentence # 1 is too long.

Too many details are hidden in the text.

Difficult Words

reimbursed
terminate
calendar year

Summary

The message of this memo is actually quite simple. The information should be organized differently for different audiences.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: All Employees

FROM: Personnel Manager

DATE: February 2, 1989

RE: SAFETY SHOES/BOOTS

==========

This is to inform you that if you purchase a new pair of safety shoes or boots, you may submit the receipt to Personnel (with your name and clock number clear printed on it) and you will be reimbursed $25.00 (maximum), tax free, on your following pay cheque.

Please understand that this is a once per calendar year, per employee, agreement. Probationary are subject to this arrangement as well, however, should their employment be terminate prior to sixty (60) working days from their start date, it is understood that the $25.00 will be deducted from their final pay cheque.

If you have any questions, please come and see me.

Thank you

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

After Clear Language

This is a benefit to employees. The tone is more positive.

The "RE:" line makes it clear that a procedure is going to be explained in the memo.

The instructions are step-by-step.

Exceptions and other important information stand out clearly.

As with any good memo or letter, there is a contact person named at the end.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

MEMO

DATE: February 2, 1989

TO: All Employees

FROM: Personnel Manager

RE: How to Save $25 on Safety Shoes and Boots

==========

Acme will pay you $25 if you buy a new pair of safety shoes or safety boots. This is what you must do:

- When you buy your new safety shoes or safety boots for this year, save the bill.
- Write your name and clock number on the bill, and give it to Personnel.
- You will receive an extra $25 on your next pay cheque.

New Employees (less than 60 working days):

- You may also turn in your bill for a $25 refund.
- If you leave the company before you have worked 60 days, we will take the $25 off your last pay cheque.

All employees:

- You may collect $25 only once a year for one pair of shoes or boots.

If you have any questions, please talk to Singh in personnel (ext. 254).

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

Before Clear Language

Once again, the "RE:" line could be more to the point.

Using numbers to list items may confuse the reader. For example, is 1 more important than 2?

Items 1 - 4 are not directed at the reader but rather "every employee." This is unnecessary.

Why does the writer use the word "responsibility" in item 4, but "duty" in 1 - 3.

Item 5 does not fit with items 1 - 4.

"If you forget to punch out it's your responsibility..."
...to do what?

The last item may be the most important to the reader. It should be emphasized.

The writer does not give a name or title to contact for further information.

Difficult Words

notify

Summary

This could be much shorter. It should be written directly to the reader.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

JANUARY 01, 1986

TO ALL EMPLOYEES

RE: TIMECARDS

(1) It is the duty of every EMPLOYEE to be responsible for punching his or her own time cards.

(2) It is the duty of every EMPLOYEE to see that the hours worked for the day agree as shown of the time card.

(3) It is the duty of every EMPLOYEE to notify their Foreman if there's any errors on their time card.

(4) It is the responsibility of every EMPLOYEE to see that their card is punched "IN" and "OUT" properly at the end of the working day.

(5) As of January 01, 1986, you will be paid according for the hours shown on your time cards.

If you forget to punch in or out it's your responsibility not the PAYROLLS DEPT.

The only excuse that will be accepted for not punching in or out will be in case of fire.

PAYROLL DEPT.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

After Clear Language

The "RE:" line is a bit more proactive. It's easier to tell people what to do than what not to do. This also clears up confusion for employees who may not have understood the procedure.

The first two points are the main thrust of the original memo.

It makes more sense to separate exceptions or deviations from the rules.

With this re-write we assume that punching out in the event of a fire is not necessary.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

MEMO

DATE: January 1, 1986

TO: All Employees

FROM: Payroll Department

RE: How to use your time cards

==========

Every day you must....

- Punch in your time card when you start work and when you end work.
- Check your time card carefully to make sure the hours on it are correct.

If there is a mistake on your time card, you must tell your supervisor as soon as possible.

We cannot pay you correctly if your time card is not correct.

Important....

- If there is an emergency, such as a fire, do not stop to punch out. Follow the safety rules. Acme will take care of your hours worked.

If you have any questions, please see Howard (ext. 289) in payroll.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

Before Clear Language

The "RE:" line is wordy.

What date does the policy come into effect?

Obviously, there is a policy that requires people to work overtime. This should be clarified first.

Items a) and b) refer only to male employees.

All items refer to "employees," not the reader.

The exception regarding "prior notice" is lost because it appears after the list is finished.

Difficult Words:

calculation
interpretation
excused absence
falls sick
substantiated
prior notice
payroll purposes

Summary

The policy is actually quite simple. The writer has made it difficult by overstating that. The information needs to be organized differently.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: March 30, 1989

RE: COMPANY EXCUSED ABSENCE FOR OVERTIME CALCULATION PURPOSES - REVISED MARCH 31, 1989

==========

There continues to be some confusion regarding the interpretation of "Company excused absence". We have tried to make this procedure as simple as possible.

An employee will be considered excused for overtime purposes if:

a) He falls sick during the shift, goes to see his doctor, and provides a note from their doctor upon their return to work.

b) He is off sick a number of days and returns to work with a doctor's note.

c) An employee calls in before start of shift or during shift and then provides proof of illness in the form of a doctor's note upon his return to work.

d) An employee tells his supervisor he has an appointment (doctor, dentist, or other within reason), for instance, next Tuesday at 1:00 and asks to be excused at 1:00 for "X" number of hours.

In other words, absences which are substantiated or genuine emergency situations will be excused for overtime purposes.

Also those that are arranged with prior notice.

Employees will not be excused for unsubstantiated absences or arriving late/leaving early without prior notice.

For payroll purposes, we would still like to see this in writing; if employees do not feel comfortable completing the form themselves, their Supervisor will assist them or complete it for them.

Please see me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

After Clear Language

The writer should be identified in an important policy document like this. Having the most senior person write it will probably eliminate confusion.

The memo explains what the overtime policy is in the first place.

The main point of the original memo was that employees are excused from overtime if they are sick. The remainder of the document just explains procedures for different circumstances.

The rules regarding doctor's appointments is stated separately.

ACME SCREW & GEAR LTD 1313 MUDDLE AVENUE, GARBLE, ON

MEMO

DATE: March 30, 1989
TO: All Employees in Production and Shipping
FROM: Carol Hines, General Manager
RE: If you cannot work overtime

==========

During busy production times, Acme usually asks you to work one overtime shift per week. Please note: Overtime begins after 35 hours.

You do not have to work the overtime shift if you are sick.

- If you are already home because you are sick, phone personnel before your shift begins to tell them that you are not coming in. When you return to work, you must bring a note from your doctor.
- If you become sick the day of your shift, phone personnel before your shift begins to tell them that you are not coming in. When you return to work, you must bring a note from your doctor.
- If you become sick during your overtime shift, see your supervisor. You may go home. When you return for work, you must bring a note from your doctor.

You do not have to work the overtime shift if you have a medical appointment.

- If you or your child has a medical appointment (doctor, dentist, etc.), you do not have to work the overtime shift. Call personnel or speak to your supervisor as soon as possible before the shift.

If you feel you have another important reason to miss the shift, please contact your supervisor or personnel.

If you have any questions about the overtime policy or the Request for Time Off form, please contact Amy (ext. 901) in personnel.

S.M.O.G Readability: _____

A List of Simpler Words and Phrases

The following is a list of over a hundred common words and phrases that may confuse some readers, and simpler ways of saying the same thing. As we have said before in this book, clear language is not just simplifying words and phrases. However, you might compare this list with some of your own writing to see if you if you have picked up any unclear writing habits. Then try again in a few weeks to see if you have improved.

accordingly	so
afford an opportunity	let
apparent	clear, plain
applicant, client, tenant	you
as a means of	to
as prescribe	under
ascertain	find out
assist, facilitate	help
at the present time	now
by means of	by, with
comply with	follow
consequently	so
consider	think
consult	talk to, see, meet
constitutes	is, forms, makes up
contains	has
discontinue	end, stop
disseminate	issue, send out
due to the fact that	since, because
dwelling, residence	home
economical	cheap
endeavour	try
enumerate	count
erroneous	wrong, false
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry
expend	pay out, spend
facilitate	ease, help
factor	reason, cause

formulate	work out, devise, form
for a period of	for
for the purpose of for, to function	act, role
furnish (supply or provide)	give, send
henceforth	from today, from now on
i.e.	that is, that means
implement	do, begin
in accordance with	by, following, under
in an effort to	to
in conjunction with	with
in consequence of	because, as
incumbent upon	must
in lieu of	instead of
in order to	to
in excess of	more than
incur	pay for
initiate	start
in regard to	about
interface with	deal with
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
in the near future	soon
in view of	because
it is essential	must
it is recommended	we recommend
it is requested	we request
liaise with	talk with
limited number	few
necessitate	need, compel, force
not later than	by
notwithstanding	in spite, despite
objective	aim, goal
obtain	get
optimum	best, greatest, most
parameters	limits
perform	do
permit	let
premises	building

pertaining to	about
preclude	prevent
proficiency	skill
provided that	if
pursuant to	following
reason for	why
receive, in receipt of	get
regarding	about, of, on
regulation	rule
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay, income, salary
render	give, make
rental unit	apartment, home
request	ask
requirement	need
reside	live
state	say
statutory	legal, bylaw
subsequent	later
substantial	large, real, strong
sufficient	enough
supplementary, additional	extra, more
take action to	act, do
terminate	end, stop
therein	there
transmit	send
transpire	happen, occur
until such time as	until
validate	confirm, make sure
vehicle	car, truck, etc.
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with the exception of	except for
utilize	use

Further Reading

On Literacy

Calamai, Peter. *Broken Words--Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate.* Toronto: Southam Communications, 1987.

Prior to Statistics Canada's LSUDA survey, the Southam survey was the largest of functional literacy undertaken. The book includes stories and interviews with literacy students and practitioners across the country. For more information, contact: Southam Communications, 150 Bloor Street West, Suite 900, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Y8.

Statistics Canada. *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities.* Ottawa, 1990.

The most complete national survey of literacy ever conducted. For more information contact: Household Surveys Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa.

On Clear Language and Writing

Baldwin, Ruth. *Clear Writing and Literacy.* Toronto: Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1990.

The book contains practical ideas on clear writing for a wide range of purposes. Topics include: how to recognize clear writing; how to use it; how to convince others to use it. For more information, contact: Clear Writing Reference Group, Ontario Literacy Coalition (see address on page 79).

Canada: Minister of Supply and Services. *Administrative Writing: Memos and Letters.* Ottawa, 1986.

A practical guide to writing in everyday business. For more information, contact: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, Canada K1A OS9.

Canada: Minister of Supply and Services. *Communicating in Print with/about Seniors.* Ottawa, 1990.

A handy booklet of DOs and DON'Ts for writing documents for older adults. It is useful for other audiences as well. For more information, contact: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, Canada. K1A OS9

Canadian Legal Information Centre. *Plain Language Resource Materials.* Toronto, (Spring) 1990.

CLIC produces this bibliography, which contains hundreds of sources on clear language. Topics include research, form design, legislation, and teaching. For more information, contact: CLIC (see address on page 79).

Gowers, Sir Ernest. *The Complete Plain Words.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.

A useful tool for any writer. Topics include precision, superfluity, jargon, clichés, padding, spelling, and grammar.

Other Sources of Information on Clear Language

May we suggest you contact the following individuals and organizations for more information on clear language training and consulting:

Mark Vale
Director
The Plain Language Centre
Canadian Legal Information Centre
600 Eglinton Avenue East
Suite 205
Toronto, Ontario
M4P 1P3

Gordon Varney
Director of Professional Writing
The Centre for Professional Writing
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3G1

Mary J. Breen
Clear Language Consultant
309 Engleburn Avenue
Peterborough, Ontario
K9H 1S8

Betty-Ann Lloyd
Kaleidoscope Communications
5533 Black Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3K 1P7

Gwen Davies
6152 Duncan Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3L 1K2

Ruth Baldwin
Plain Writing Services
P.O. Box 6086
Station J
Ottawa, Ontario
K2A 1T1

Mary Breen
Clear Writing Reference Group
Ontario Literacy Coalition
365 Bloor Street East
Suite 1003
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3L4

Ingrid Kolsteren
Progressive Literacy Group
2185 East Third Street
Vancouver, British Columbia
V5M 1H9

Other *Clear Lines* Resources

The Video:

The Clear Writer's Hit Squad
Length: Approximately 16 minutes
Video profiles The Clear Writer's Hit List.

Workshops:

Clear Lines: How to compose and design clear language documents
Length: One day
Workshops are based on materials supplied by participants.

Or let us come to you. We would be happy to arrange workshops tailored to your needs.

For more information, contact:

Learning in the Workplace
Frontier College
35 Jackes Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4T 1E2
TEL: (416) 923-3591
FAX: (416) 323-3522

Readability Estimates of Sample Documents

Document	S.M.O.G. Estimate*
Page 64 - Before Clear Language	16.5 to 19.5 years
Page 65 - After Clear Language	8.5 to 11.5 years
Page 66 - Before Clear Language	9.0 to 12.0 years
Page 67 - After Clear Language	6.5 to 9.5 years
Page 68 - Before Clear Language	13.5 to 16.5 years
Page 69 - After Clear Language	7.0 to 10.0 years
Page 70 - Before Clear Language	9.0 to 12.0 years
Page 71 - After Clear Language	7.0 to 10.0 years
Page 72 - Before Clear Language	8.5 to 11.5 years
Page 73 - After Clear Language	7.0 to 10.0 years

* Estimates rounded off to the nearest half.

References

Introduction

Statistics Canada (1990). *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities.* Ottawa. 2.

Des Lauriers, Bob. "Functional Illiteracy in Canadian Business." *Canadian Business Review.* Volume 16, Number 4 (Winter, 1989): 36-37.

Part One:
Literacy in Canada and The Importance of Clear Language

Statistics Canada (1990). Ibid. 2-3.

Statistics Canada (1990). Ibid. 2-3.

Calamai, Peter. *Broken Words--Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate.* Toronto: Southam Communications, 1987, 9.

Statistics Canada (1990). Op.Cit. 2.

Mickulecky, Larry and W. Diehl. "The Nature of Reading at Work." *Journal of Reading* 24, 1980, 221-227.

Calamai, Peter. (1987). Op.Cit. 47.

Part Two:
The Basic Principles of Clear Writing

McLaughlin, G. Harry. "A New Readability Formula." *Journal of Reading* (May 1969): 39-46.

NOTES

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